

## **Prescribed Fire for Native Grasses at New River New River Gorge National River, West Virginia National Fire Plan – Fuels Reduction**

With the right weather forecast, New River Gorge National River conducted a prescribed burn near the Sandstone Visitor Center on Monday, April 11, 2005. A 0.6 acre grassy hillside in front of the visitor center was burned to discourage tree growth in favor of native grasses and plants. Beginning just before 11:00 a.m., the operation was done in about an hour. “We used drip torches to set a backing fire in a series of strip burns to reduce the intensity and potential for the fire to escape. Water from fire hose lines was applied to places that we didn’t want to get too hot, such as where native plants are already growing,” Fire Management Officer Bruce Miller explained.



*Fire crews ignite prescribed fire near Sandstone Visitor Center.*

Fourteen NPS employees were assisted by staff from the Green Sulphur District Volunteer Fire Department and the West Virginia Division of Forestry. Also on hand were two Summers County plant nursery and landscape businessmen: Peter Haus, owner of the Enchanter’s Garden, and Chris Chanlett, owner of Groundworks. The NPS has contracted with Haus and Chanlett to help maintain the visitor center landscape in a way that reflects natural conditions found on dry hillsides of the New River watershed.

John Perez, NPS Wildlife Biologist, was the ignition specialist. “Today’s prescribed burn removed and recycled the thick stubble into nutrients necessary to stimulate growth of native grasses,” said Perez. “They will grow to 6-8 feet tall and will need to be burned every 2-5 years to keep this plant community in an early stage of succession. It will provide excellent food and shelter for a variety of song birds, small mammals, and game animals.”

“Although today’s burn was successful in terms of immediate objectives, it will be a year before we can determine if our long term goals were met,” Perez continued. “We want to see at least 60% of the vegetation in native grasses and no more than 10% in woody species.”

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